Phraseology in children's literature: a contrastive analysis
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8 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In the first part of this dissertation, we outlined the theoretical and methodological issues concerning our research. In Chapter 2 contrastive linguistics, phraseology and Translation Studies were discussed, and how these disciplines interact in our study. Although phraseology can be seen as the primary field in which this dissertation is positioned, the approach to the analysis of phraseological units comes from contrastive linguistics: we have confronted Dutch phraseological units with their Italian translatants, and Italian phraseological units with their Dutch translatants. The problematic conventional criteria for phraseological units were reviewed, thus highlighting the far from discrete, but rather gradual and heterogeneous character of phraseology. Translation Studies add a layer of interdisciplinarity due to the choice of our corpus. The need to study phraseological units in their pragmatic context has steered us towards a literary text and its translation, as they can be considered parallel texts. Furthermore, the much-debated concept of equivalence is deemed a useful parameter in the analysis of the translation of phraseological units, alongside more linguistic parameters.

Specifically, a Dutch children's book and its Italian translation have been chosen as a corpus, because both the author and the translator are expected to base their phraseological choices, just like their linguistic and cultural choices in

general, on what they assume the phraseological competence of their young receivers is. In this way, we had a possibility to evaluate how Children's Literature can contribute to the identification of a core phraseological inventory. In Chapter 3 we addressed specific issues regarding Children's Literature, that mostly revolve around the asymmetrical power relationships that characterise the children's books industry. The child addressee does not have any possibility to give input, because adults (producers, intermediaries and buyers) do all the decision-making. Furthermore, the exchange of CL between different cultures is very imbalanced: some cultures export enormous amounts of children's books, but import very few; others import a great deal. The globalisation and commercialisation of the industry only reinforce this imbalance. This means that translation is a crucial link, and translators need specific strategies. The expectations of the translators are high, because of the cultural importance of children's books and the norms, values and views of society they should reflect. The choice between a foreignizing or domesticating approach is thus a very difficult one. Although there is no doubt about the importance of Children's Literature in language acquisition, there is no consensus on the use of children's books in second language teaching. Some scholars argue that the understanding of CL might be challenging for L2 learners, while others argue it is excellent material to acquire a larger vocabulary and build L2 proficiency. However, both students and teachers use children's books. In the last paragraph of Chapter 3, some studies on phraseology in Children's Literature are discussed.

We have outlined our methodology and research instruments in Chapter 4. The CREAMY platform has been a crucial asset for the annotation and analysis of the phraseological units and their translatants. A total of twenty fields are available to carry out a detailed and systematic contrastive analysis. The most important parameters are "type of phraseological unit" and "structural composition", which separate a semantic and syntactic analysis level, that in other research are mostly intertwined. The other parameters used for the analysis are

"type of meaning", "lexical category", "language variety", "use value", "semantic field", and "translational equivalence". Aside from CREAMY, an aligned corpus was created to ease the annotation process and Excel was used to make up for more complex functions the platform does not yet provide[121].

The empirical part of this research is contained in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The findings regarding the analysis of the Dutch phraseological units and their Italian translatants are presented in Chapter 5. An interesting aspect of the Dutch phraseological inventory is the massive presence of compounds, compared to the more prototypical multiword expressions. Idioms, collocations and "other" PUs recur in similar amounts. However, the more opaque expressions are, the more likely they are to have a non-phraseological translatant or no translatant. Idioms thus have the least phraseological translatants in Italian compared to collocations and especially semantically transparent phraseological units. Only a relatively small part of the Dutch phraseological inventory is characterised by a figurative meaning. This is also due to the criteria used for the inclusion (or exclusion) of expressions in our phraseological inventory: there is a large amount of compounds and separable complex verbs, as a result of which the vast majority of PUs are non-figurative – but most of these have a non-compositional meaning[122]. From a structural point of view, the multiword expressions in the inventory are mostly co-occurrences of lexical morphemes or light verb constructions. Over three-fifths of the compounds (almost two-fifths of the whole inventory) are separable complex verbs. This also means that the Dutch inventory is in large part of verbal nature; nominal and, to a lesser extent, adverbial constructions are also common. The translational equivalence between

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[121] Excel was used to carry out cross-searches of both phraseological units in the starting text and translatants in the arrival text, by selecting one or more properties (e.g. metonymical idioms that have a semantically transparent translatant belonging to the semantic field of "physical action"). The search and analysis options CREAMY provides are described in §4.2.3.
[122] Excluding these kinds of units from analyses would lead to a restricted view on the problems and difficulties that phraseology causes.

the Dutch phraseological units and Italian translatants shows a strong predominance of the semantic level over the formal level.

In Chapter 6 the analysis of the inverted perspective is presented, regarding the Italian phraseological units and their Dutch translatants. Whereas the amount of phraseological units is very similar to those present in the Dutch text, the composition of the inventory is very different. There is only a small amount of compounds – which highlights the tendency of Dutch to compounding – but a large part of the inventory consists in semantically transparent phraseological units. The Dutch translatants of Italian phraseological units are most often of non-phraseological nature. Although Italian PUs as well mostly have non-figurative meanings, compositional expressions are much more frequent than in Dutch due to the large amount of semantically transparent PUs. From a structural point of view, almost two-fifths of the Italian inventory is characterised by the presence of one or more prepositions; as was the case for Dutch, co-occurrences of lexical morphemes and light verb constructions are the next most common structural compositions. There is a massive shift in lexical nature between Dutch and Italian phraseological units – adverbial and (to a lesser extent) prepositional expressions are a lot more common in Italian, and verbal and nominal expressions a lot less common. As was the case for translational equivalence in the first analysis, semantic equivalence is rather high, especially compared to the rather low formal equivalence.

In Chapter 7 these two perspectives have been combined in a bidirectional analysis. Whereas some aspects of the phraseological inventories are rather similar, some significant differences were highlighted. One of those is the aforementioned presence of compounds and (among compounds) separable complex verbs in Dutch; although Italian has a verb-particle construction similar to SCVs, these syntagmatic verbs are over five times less frequent in Italian. On the contrary, all other types of phraseological units (idioms, collocations, "other" PUs, sayings) are more frequent in Italian. This also has consequences for the

type of meaning. Whereas a similar percentage of phraseological units is non-figurative, we find a big discrepancy in compositional and non-compositional constructions. The latter is much more frequent in Dutch due to the presence of compounds, while the former is much more frequent in Italian due to the relatively large amount of semantically transparent PUs. The internal structure of the phraseological units in Dutch and Italian also shows major differences. Compounds continue to dominate the phraseological inventory of Dutch also from a structural point of view, but Italian phraseological units are often characterised by the presence of prepositions. The second and third most common structural compositions for both Dutch and Italian – co-occurrences of lexical morphemes and light verb constructions – are both more frequent in Italian.

Phraseological units of verbal nature are much more common in the Dutch phraseological inventory. However, most of these are separable complex verbs, and Italian verb phrases are actually more common than Dutch verb phrases. These verb phrases only partially cover separable complex verbs, and almost half correspond to a non-phraseological expression in Dutch. Most separable complex verbs have a simple verb translatant in Italian. Nominal phraseological units also recur much more frequently in the Dutch phraseological inventory, because of the presence of non-compositional noun compounds. Adverbial phraseological units, on the other hand, have many more occurrences in the Italian inventory, that mostly have no phraseological equivalent in Dutch. The different nature of the phraseological units between the two languages becomes really clear when contrasting verbal and nominal PUs: they make up 81,6% of the Dutch, and only 43,5% of the Italian phraseological inventory. Learners of Dutch, even at a low proficiency level, will need to deal with compounds, and especially with the notoriously difficult separable complex verbs. Learners of Italian, on the other hand, are confronted with many adverbial phrases that are often characterised by the presence of prepositions.

Translational equivalence, on the contrary, has the same tendency in the two analyses. The higher the grade of equivalence on the semantic level, the more frequent it is. On a formal level, this is the opposite: the higher the grade of equivalence, the lower the frequency. Comparing the two perspectives as a whole, equivalence between the Italian phraseological units and the corresponding portions of text in Dutch is higher – both on a semantic and on a formal level – than between the Dutch phraseological units and their Italian translatants.

Given the immense amount of data this summary cannot be exhaustive, but some findings have been highlighted. It is now necessary to put these in a broader perspective, and try to answer the questions at the base of this research. As for the first question (*What are the similarities and differences between the Dutch and (translated) Italian phraseological inventories?*), in the foregoing we have illustrated some of the similarities and differences between the Dutch and (translated) Italian phraseological inventories, and much more detailed analyses can be found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Some of the more striking ones are, for instance:

- The different lexical nature of the inventories (verbal and nominal PUs compose 81,6% of the Dutch inventory, only 43,5% of the Italian inventory);
- The high amount of compounds in the Dutch phraseological inventory (63,2%) and of multiword expressions in the Italian inventory (96,7%);
- A high amount of non-figurative, non-compositional phraseological units in Dutch compared to Italian (58,7% vs. 38,8%);
- The presence of prepositions that characterises many Italian phraseological units (39,5% vs. 3,3% in Dutch).

Naturally, these findings refer to this specific corpus, and will need to be confronted with those of other corpora – both of Children's Literature and Adult Literature. One of the limitations of this research is that without confronting our data in a broader perspective, we cannot be certain our findings have a general value, too. For example, the style of the author and the translator might have a

significant influence on phraseological choices, as well as the translation strategies implemented by the translator, but also influence of other professionals during the publication process and source text interference.

The second question (*What equivalence is there between Dutch phraseological units translated into Italian, and translated Italian phraseological units in their original Dutch*) has also been addressed in the foregoing. The findings regarding the inverted tendency of semantic and formal equivalence (high or total semantic equivalence: NL-IT 78,1%, IT-NL 81,1%; absent or low formal equivalence NL-IT 78,2%, IT-NL 73,6%) are corroborated by other research that has applied the same methodology with a corpus of Adult Literature[123]. This indicates that our findings might not be limited to phraseological inventories of only Children's Literature.

The third and last question (*How can a study of phraseology in Children's Literature contribute to identifying a core phraseological inventory of a language?*) is more challenging to answer. Some indications come from the language varieties used in our corpus. The vast majority of PUs are part of standard language, both in Dutch and Italian, but some are mainly part of spoken and/or colloquial language. The few formal phraseological units and translatants all recur in instances of direct speech between adults. This does not confirm nor dispute that Children's Literature could be used to identify a core phraseological inventory, but does give us some direction for future research. Some other interesting insights come from the usage marks that are added consistently in the Italian reference dictionary[124]. Some of them refer to the *Nuovo vocabolario di base della lingua italiana* (De Mauro 2016). This list of circa seven thousand words combines a frequency dictionary with words that are considered "available" to most language users, even if they do not have a frequent occurrence. Lemmata marked "Fondamentale" belong to the circa two thousand most frequently used words that cover around 86% of the total occurrences. Lemmata marked with "Alto

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[123] See single chapters on different language pairs in Koesters Gensini & Berardini (2020).
[124] Unfortunately, this is not the case for the Dutch reference dictionary.

uso" belong to the approximately three thousand words that cover around 6% of the occurrences. "Alta disponibilità", on the other hand, is used to mark words that do not occur frequently but are understandable by most language users because they refer to objects or actions that concern everyday life. Not part of the *Vocabolario di base*, are the lemmata marked "Comune" (these words are generally understood by those who have a medium to high education level) and "Tecnico-specialistico" (words used mostly in technical or scientific contexts). Over one-third (35,7%) of Italian phraseological units in our corpus has no description in the reference dictionary. All PUs that do have a description (64,3%), also have a usage mark. These usage marks have the following frequencies: Fondamentale 12,0%, Alto uso 4,6%, Alta disponibilità 1,4%, Comune 80,4%, Tecnico-specialistico 1,6%. This means that over half of the phraseological inventory in *Uiplalà* is "common" (51,7% of all PUs, with or without a description). However, these usage marks are not always directly attributed to a phraseological unit. Often PUs do not have a separate description, but are included in the description of one of their lemmata. This distorts the view we have of the actual usage marks of phraseological units, and is why further research will be necessary to evaluate if this is a viable approach. Other approaches could be to confront the phraseological units found in corpora of Children's Literature (for instance separated by age groups of the intended readership) with those found in different corpora, and with frequency data.

Several other prospects for further research have been suggested in the course of this dissertation, including:

- An investigation into the different internal structures of phraseological compounds, for example by dividing them into endocentric and exocentric compounds, or by dividing them into four subtypes based on the transparency of the single constituents;
- A specific study on the internal structures of phraseological units, in order to identify a limited amount of structural compositions that cover

most structures, while avoiding any overlap between different subcategories;

- An attempt to identify the convergence and divergence between the current semantic fields used on CREAMY and the *UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS)*, in order to replace the whole system for all studies conducted on the platform to guarantee comparability;

- A closer look at the similar amounts of phraseological units in the Dutch and translated Italian text, which provided an unexpected result when compared to previously conducted research with an original Italian and translated Dutch text;

- A study specifically on the phraseological units that have not been translated or have been too freely translated: why is this the case? Do translation strategies play a role? How does this difficulty in translation relate to the semantic opacity of phraseological units?

- A study on the difference between phraseological and non-phraseological translatants: which parameters tend to correspond or, on the contrary, differ? Is it possible to identify specific translation strategies when a translator prefers a non-phraseological solution above a phraseological unit?

- A detailed study on the norms underlying our corpus and deviances from those, that might be caused by source text interference (translationese);

- A closer look at the evidence present in our corpus for Berman's deforming tendency "The destruction of expressions and idioms";

- A case study on Dutch adjectival compounds like *ijskoud* and *keihard*, that are translated with similes into Italian.

Although the data collected and analysed in this dissertation cannot prove that Children's Literature is, indeed, a fruitful corpus for the identification of a core inventory of phraseology, it has provided several indications on possible approaches. Our hypothesis that CL can be used as one of text types for the

identification of a core phraseological inventory stands, and future studies in this direction might be able to further clarify the issue. The research presented here can, however, directly contribute both on a theoretical and practical level to all disciplines involved. No investigation had been conducted yet on Dutch phraseology in Children's Literature, let alone in a contrastive manner with Italian. The detailed contrastive analysis and the mapping of similarities and differences between the Dutch and translated Italian phraseological inventories have offered both intra- and interlinguistic insights and can provide data for future studies in the field of (contrastive) linguistics, phraseology, and Translation Studies.